

## Pamela J. Foltz



Pam Foltz was born in Washington, DC in June 1958, and grew up in Fairfax County, Virginia. She attended Falls Church High School and then attended Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina where she studied health and physical education. Motivated by a desire to save lives and property and with the strong support of her parents, Foltz left college to pursue a career as a firefighter/rescuer.

Chief Robert Tappan and Lt. Richard Arnold of the Glen Echo Fire Department put their reputations on the line by hiring a woman, Pam Foltz, who was only 21 at the time.

In 1979, Foltz made history when she became the first woman in Montgomery County to successfully complete fire recruit school. This accomplishment made her the first female career firefighter in Montgomery County. During this time, the department had no policy for maternity leave; uniforms and gear were tailored only for men. Firehouse living quarters and locker rooms were not designed for women and only male grooming standards existed. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1979, only 50 percent of women worked outside of the home. There were only 24 female career firefighters in the entire country that year. Firefighter Pamela Foltz pushed that number up to 25.

Prior to 1988, all firehouses in the county were corporations, firefighters were not county employees. In 1989 the corporations transitioned to the county, making all career firefighters county employees. During this transition, Firefighter Foltz transferred to Station 1 in downtown Silver Spring because she wanted to work in a busier house. She stayed at Station 1 for the remainder of her career. At one point, Foltz's shift was referred to as "the shift of diversity" because the crew of firefighters included Foltz, a female firefighter, an African-American male firefighter as well as a Hispanic male firefighter.

A striking moment in her career came in the late 1990's when she arrived for work at Station 1 and the shift lineup showed an all-female truck crew on duty. She believes it was the first time this had ever occurred in the county. Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) was considered very progressive during this period. The Los Angeles Fire Department as well as other departments across the country sought guidance from MCFRS regarding women issues, including testing standards, uniform and grooming standards, sleeping quarters policies, and pregnancy policies.

Throughout Firefighter Foltz's career, she did more than "firefighting." She was involved in river rescues and was a member of a hand-picked team to assist FEMA fighting the wild land fires in Florida. Foltz also served on the firefighter recruitment team, as an instructor at the training academy for new recruits, and as a member of the Honor Guard. Firefighter Foltz has received several unit citations throughout her career as well as numerous letters of appreciation from the residents of Montgomery County. For many, years Firefighter Foltz was an active member of Women in the Fire Service.

Today, Montgomery County's female career firefighters number 78, or 7.8 percent of the present workforce – a statistic that is more than double the national average of 3.6 percent. Of this group, 30 women have been with MCFRS for more than 20 years.

Happy to have blazed the trail, Firefighter Foltz has advised women interested in joining the force: "Pave your own path. Don't follow anybody. That's how trees are made. Follow your own branch."

Foltz retired from the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service on October 1, 2011 with 32 years of service to the citizens of Montgomery County.

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